

# Clear Reference

A pronoun's meaning is only clear when the reader knows to which word (s) the pronoun refers.  
Peg asked Leonardo to tell her what the surprise was, but he refused.

- He replaces the antecedent Leonardo.

## AMBIGUOUS REFERENCE

Occurs when any one of two or more words could be a pronoun's antecedent.

Colleen called Alicia while she was doing her homework. – Whose homework?

- While Colleen was doing her homework, she called Alicia.
- While Alicia was doing her homework, Colleen called her.

The police officer told the sergeant that a button was missing from her uniform.

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Since the show was scheduled for the same night as the intramural playoff game, it had to be postponed.

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## GENERAL REFERENCE

The use of a pronoun that refers to a general idea rather than to a specific antecedent. Common pronouns: it, that, this, which

The gusts grew stronger, and rain clouds began rolling in from the distant hills. This prompted the campers to seek shelter.

- The gusts grew stronger, and rain clouds began rolling in from the distant hills. These ominous conditions prompted the campers to seek shelter.
- As the gusts grew stronger and rain clouds began rolling in from the distant hills, the campers sought shelter.

My parents bought new carpet and new curtains, and they hired someone to paint the walls and ceiling. That certainly improved the appearance of the room.

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We hiked all morning and then went skiing at the Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, which made us all extremely tired.

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## WEAK REFERENCE

Occurs when a pronoun refers to an antecedent that has been suggested but not expressed.

Every time a circus came to town, my sister Erin wanted to become one of them. (them is suggested, just not expressed)

- Every time a circus came to town, my sister Erin wanted to become one of the troupe.

Mom is very interested in psychiatry, but she does not believe they know all the answers.

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Deep-sea fishing isn't very enjoyable to me unless I catch at least one.

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## INDEFINITE REFERENCE

The use of a pronoun that refers to no particular person or thing and that is unnecessary to the meaning and structure of a sentence.

Common pronouns: it, they, you

In the newspaper it reported that a volcano had erupted in the Indian Ocean. (don't need it)

- The newspaper reported that a volcano had erupted in the Indian Ocean.

When Grandpa was a child, you were supposed to be absolutely silent at the table.

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In *The Diary of Anne Frank*, it shows a young Jewish girls' courage during two years of hiding from the Nazis.

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